

# Forage Focus

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
**Extension**

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## Drought Survival Meetings Offered

The drought this summer has caused many headaches for livestock producers who are preparing to feed cattle this winter with little forage and hay on hand. The Lawrence and Greene County Extension Councils are offering meetings on Friday, August 17 at two locations for cattle producers who want to discuss this issue and gain tips for surviving the drought. The programs will focus on supplementing low quality hay, alternative feeds, herd culling tips, precautions with nitrates and prussic acid, fall forage alternatives and assessing the price of forages. Producers are welcome to bring lower stems of fertilized sudangrass, millet, Johnsongrass and bermudagrass for a quick subjective analysis of nitrates.

Dr. Eric Bailey, state beef nutrition specialist, Eldon Cole, regional livestock specialist, Jill Scheidt, regional agronomy specialist, Jim Spencer, regional ag business specialist, and I will be on hand for the discussion. On August 17 a meeting will be offered from 9 a.m. until noon at the University of Missouri Southwest Research Center (14548 Hwy H) at Mt. Vernon. Another meeting will be offered from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. the same day at the Springfield Livestock Marketing Center. No preregistration is needed. There are additional meetings being planned in the coming weeks for Grove Spring, West Plains, Hollister and Squires. Stay tuned for details to follow.

## Southwest Center Field Day/Ag Ed Day—September 13

On Thursday, September 13 will serve as both the annual field day and the ag education day at the Southwest Center at Mt. Vernon. It will begin at 8:30 a.m. and end at 2:00 p.m. Our main speakers will be weed management specialists from Columbia who will discuss weed control. Bring your questions and weeds to be identified. Both FFA students and farm producers can avail themselves of many additional topics during the day.

## Evaluate Your Pastures—Fall Forage is Crucial to Lowering Hay Costs

August is the month to evaluate pasture grass stands. If your tall fescue fields are near dormant, but still thick and full of tall fescue, it's generally suggested to fertilize for a fall stockpile, close gates on selected fields and let it grow through September, October and perhaps November before rationing that forage out to them in December. This is a great hay-saving practice, especially if strip grazing is used over the winter.

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Above: Typical pasture and pond conditions in parts of southwest Missouri. Below: Many corn fields are being chopped for silage.



This year, even fescue fields where the cows may be on could benefit from a lower dose of nitrogen just to kick start them when the rains return. If you have bermudagrass fields, don't forget that you can also stockpile them using nitrogen and closing gates. Just remember to graze them first after frost before any fescue is grazed.

### **Fescue Pastures: To Fertilize or Not to Fertilize?**

That is the question many livestock producers are asking themselves right now. With dry weather and dormant pastures, will it pay to fertilize with nitrogen in August for a fall stockpile? For those who have access to ammonium nitrate from their dealer, there is little to no concern with nitrogen loss by volatilization in hot weather. It will wait on the rain. The only concern may be a heavy downpour that could carry it down a hill. But if urea is used, be sure to use a stabilizer like Agrotain which will give only 14 days of volatilization protection. It will need  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$ " of rain to protect it before 14 days is up. There is potential after that time to lose 25-50% of the N applied under certain conditions. It's suggested to not apply it onto dew. Those who are using SuperU will be in even better shape. This is a polymer protected urea source. It should be safe to go ahead and apply 40-60 lbs nitrogen per acre using ammonium nitrate now through the end of August. Using urea may be more of a concern in dry weather so it may be best to watch for good chances of rain or to wait until later in August and hopefully we will be in a rainier period by then. I suggest for sure being done with fall fertilizer by mid-September. If you are fearful about using the urea, you could perhaps stay on the lower range of the suggested nitrogen rates. Farming is all about hedging your bets, playing the odds and taking risks, so if we do little we may get little in return. It's important to consider that in three weeks we may be in a totally different world. I suggest we should proceed like we will get rain by early September. We want the nitrogen to be in place when the first rains and cooler nights begin. This is definitely a year to plan to stockpile as much fescue as possible this fall.



### **Is there a Place for Winter Annuals on your Farm this Fall?**

Winter annuals such as cereal rye, triticale, barley and wheat can be used to supplement fall and winter grazing and hay supplies. Most extension agronomists do not recommend these on good solid stands of fescue believing it's counter-productive to the fescue potential and less cost-effective. If the stand is weak, full of summer grassy weeds and broadleaves, it may be justifiable. They are especially beneficial in fields where corn, sudangrass or millet was used the previous summer or in dormant stands of bermudagrass, crabgrass or Caucasian bluestem. They are not recommended in native grass stands due to the stress they can put on the grass before or during dormancy or as dormancy breaks in the spring. Cereal rye and barley are considered the most productive for fall and early winter grazing, followed by triticale. Wheat may be less useful for fall grazing but there will be some limited grazing in the fall or winter. It will produce more abundantly in the spring. For that reason, wheat can also be used as an early spring hay or baleage crop. Rye will mature out early in the spring and the quality drops rapidly unless stocking density is managed to keep it vegetative longer. In good falls when cereal rye or barley is planted early and we have plenty of moisture, there is sometimes a hay or haylage crop that can be taken, but that will limit the grazing potential of the crop. Seed prices are higher this year so it will be important to develop a sound plan.

Turnips are a very inexpensive feed source but it's important to plant them early (late August preferred) where there will be little competition for them. Where the cereal grains are typically drilled  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1" deep in the soil, they need to be shallow planted. Often they are broadcasted on top of the ground, if competition is removed. Some also use radish or rape seed.